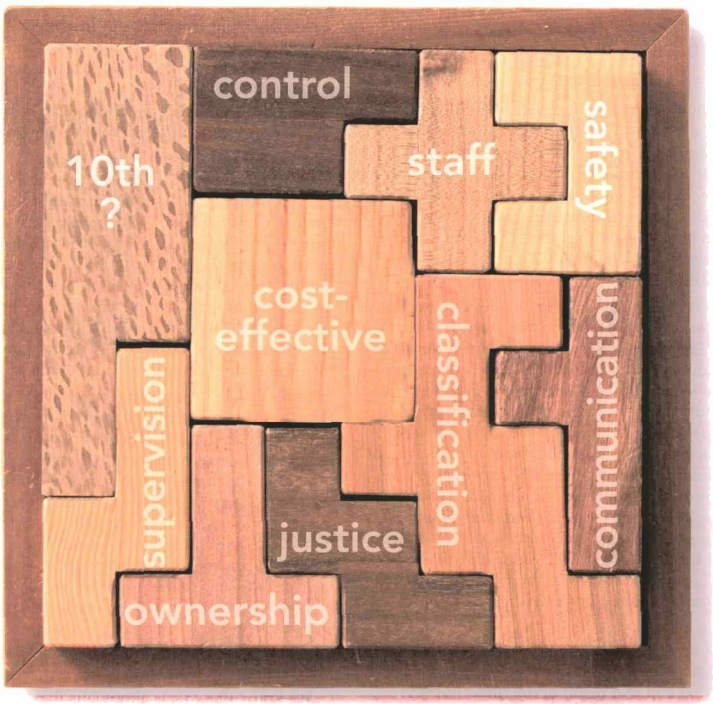
A CASE FOR A 10TH PRINCIPLE
Bird, Don
American Jails; Nov/Dec 2009; 23, 5; Criminal Justice Database
pg. 45

A CASE FOR A 10TH PRINCIPLE



DON BIRD

In his article "So You Want to Be a Direct Supervision Jail Manager" (*American Jails,* January/February 2009) Peter Perroncello asks the question of jail managers: "If it were up to you, would you change, modify, or add to the original nine principles of direct supervision?"

"too often negative behavior is what is expected...."

This question was raised by a panel of jail practitioners at the 27th Annual Training Conference & Jail Expo of the American Jail Association (AJA) held in Sacramento, California, in the spring of 2008. Mr. Perroncello goes on to say that even though some of the panel wanted to keep the nine principles as they were, it may be time to add a tenth principle that included "inmate responsibility." I would like to make a case for adding that 10th principle.

Anyone who has studied the Principles of Direct Supervision knows that the principles have evolved over the last 25 years. This evolution has mirrored the changes in jail operations, advances in technology, and classification techniques as well as the increasing diversity of jail staffs throughout the country. Every year AJA holds a discussion on the present state of the nine principles of direct supervision on the first day of its annual national training conference. That these principles are time-tested is a tribute to their original authenticity. That they are living, interwoven, fluid, and adaptable is perhaps their greatest strength. I have attended almost every one of these first-day discussions for at least 18 years, and I constantly marvel at the way in which jail practitioners continually innovate using these nine principles.

In the last few years though, I have been frustrated by my inability to place the burgeoning concept of positive inmate socialization as a result of the direct supervision environment into any of the existing definitions of the nine principles. Therefore, it is my contention that this phenomenon represents the evolution of a 10th principle.

To have predicted 25 years ago that inmates could achieve a modicum of pro-social behavior was to invite ridicule and scorn from a relatively hardened profession. The benefits of a direct supervision environment were viewed strictly by benefitted staff or management. Occasionally the point was made that a direct supervision environment with sound-reducing carpeted floors, spacious dayrooms, and windows to the outside did, in fact, reduce inmates stress; however, no further conclusions were drawn beyond that. Besides, having a principle that was inmate-centric is anathema to our profession. Jail practitioners are not going to stick out their necks by predicting anything but negative inmate behavior. It is how we plan, it is how we build, and it is how we train. "An inmate is an inmate is an inmate." We have all been impacted by the realities of our profession.

However, nearly all direct supervision practitioners report a marked reduction in typical jail-related negative behavior. It is common knowledge that inmate-on-inmate as well as inmate-on-staff assaults and other serious incidents are reduced (in some cases extremely reduced) by the direct supervision environment. Direct supervision is cost effective because expensive high security fixtures are eschewed in favor of regular household or low-end institutional models. Vandalism is rare and so these same low-cost fixtures maximize their lifespan.

Officers who work in direct supervision facilities are praised for their compassion and ability to role model. Diversity has become the hallmark of a competent staff. Officers are recognized for the life experience they bring to the job and their ability to relate that experience to the inmates. So, is inmate compliance and positive behavior solely motivated by the fear of disciplinary consequences? Or, can we envision the same kind of social agreement that exists in society on the outside, created by normalizing the environment on the inside?

In his article, "Controlling Inmate Behavior Through Effective Management Practices" (*American Jails*, January/February 2005), Scott Hoke suggests a direct correlation between an inmate's environment and an inmate's behavioral expectations. He points out that "too often negative behavior is what is expected and influences how jails are built, staffed, and publicly perceived." He states that the direct supervision environment was designed to produce pro-social or "normalized" inmate behavior. So can we deduce that conveying positive expectations of behavior in an institutional setting is a given function of direct supervision? Let's look at what we have learned from 25 years of practicing direct supervision.

We know these facts about jails that practice the nine principles of direct supervision:

- An environment is created that allows for a higher level of expectation of inmate behavior.
- This behavior is characterized by normalized, pro-social interpersonal contact not only between inmates, but between inmates and staff as well.
- This higher level of behavioral expectation manifests itself in an atmosphere of mutual respect and accountability.
- When officers show respect to the inmates, the inmates return that respect.
- When officers are accountable to the inmates (Principle 8: Justice and Fairness), inmates will be accountable to the officers.

Is it too far a leap to say that if inmates are accountable then they are also responsible? Again, what have we observed in 25 years?

- Inmates are responsible for compliance with the rules.

- Inmates are responsible for keeping their living area quiet and clean.
- Inmates are responsible for conducting themselves in an appropriate manner at all times.

Yet we practitioners still act as if this responsibility is only an occasional and fortunate side effect of direct supervision! We have been so conditioned to anticipate low expectations for inmate behavior that we are unwilling to recognize that the bar has been raised for quite some time. And the bar has been raised by direct supervision!

Former AJA President Tony Callisto has been quoted as saying, "I certainly am professionally ready for a 10th principle, but... I would require that it be premised on management and operations actions, not inmate actions."

The Nine Principles of Direct Supervision

1. Effective Control.
2. Effective Supervision.
3. Competent Staff.
4. Safety of Staff and Inmates.
5. Manageable and Cost-Effective Operations.
6. Effective Communications.
7. Classification and Orientation.
8. Justice and Fairness.
9. Ownership of Operation.

Adopted by the American Jail Association Board of Directors on November 14, 1992, and re-affirmed on May 3, 2008.

I submit that the normalization of the inmate environment and the resultant and associated behavioral expectations are the result of a deliberately applied management style. I would also argue that this expectation is an essential element of every direct supervision environment just as effective control and supervision, communication, competent staff, and the safety of staff and inmates in a manageable environment are all essential elements.

Additionally, management is responsible for the culture of a facility. This culture includes lines of communication, chain of command, interpersonal interaction, workplace atmosphere, ethics, and philosophy. A jail's management chooses what aspects of these cultural attributes it wants to prioritize. More often than not, the culture is manifested in the daily operations of a facility. Competent staff, justice and fairness, effective communications and ownership are examples of four principles that are cultural in nature.

Accordingly, my 10th principle is titled "Respect and Responsibility." This principle is built on the idea that these two qualities are fundamental to direct supervision, as they are contingent on the basic assumptions of direct supervision involving humane treatment and competent management. An underlying supposition in direct supervision is that people will act in a fashion that is in their own best interest. The direct supervision environment exists in part because inmates recognize the difference. Objective classification reinforces the notion that 9 out of 10 inmates will choose the direct supervision environment over a more restrictive one.

Similarly, inmate-to-staff ratios work to ensure that detention officers know their inmates and the inmates know the officers. Fundamental to this interaction is the establishment of an interpersonal relationship between the officer and inmate, the acknowledged ideal being the officer as a role model. Respect is essential to this connection. An outnumbered detention officer maintains order in the dayroom because inmates have respect for the system he/she represents and for the officer as the system's embodiment. Experienced officers all know that a respectful approach is the surest means to inmate compliance.

Respect is also based on relating to the other person as a real person and not someone who is dehumanized or stereotyped. A department's culture of respect manifests itself on the street as well as on the inside. It is evident in all personal interactions. It is basic to how the department is perceived by the public and how it perceives itself. It is cultivated by excellent departments and ignored by failures. A culture of respect and responsibility is as fundamental to a successful direct supervision environment as are the first nine principles. Like the other nine, it cannot exist independently, and like the other nine, without it, true direct supervision is not present.

In another *American Jails* article ("Beyond the Ninth Principle?" January/February 2005) Peter Perroncello states: "the principles provide us direction, the principles provide us support, and most of all by adopting the totality of their meaning, the principles accept that employees will know what and when to do it within an 'empowered' organization. It then boils down to the vision and values you set for yourself and your agency."

I am not such an optimist as to believe that direct supervision has created a utopian environment where inmates are no longer manipulative, dishonest, or self-centered. That jail staffs are ultimately the arbiters of how inmates behave in their jails, however, makes the principle of "Respect and Responsibility" consistent with Mr. Perroncello's observation. After 25 years, we, as jail practitioners, can count on this principle in the same fashion that we count on the other nine principles.

Don Bird, CJM, joined the staff of the newly built Pitkin County Jail, in Aspen Colorado, in September 1984. He became the Pitkin County Jail Administrator in 1991 and a Certified Jail Manager in 1997. Mr. Bird may be reached at 970–920–5331 or *db89@co.pitkin.co.us*.